

Writing a communications plan

A planning guide for community prevention partners

We want to support your work preventing substance use and promoting mental health in our communities across Washington State. Whether you are bringing a state sponsored or national campaign to your community, or designing your own messaging, this template can be used as a guide to help develop clear and effective social marketing messages. Below you will find heading guides to write a communications plan, along with prompts and advice for designing a campaign from start to finish.

Background

What is the problem/health issue? Include a statement of need based on local, state or national data.

- Example: 20% of 10th graders reported using alcohol in the past month in the [Washington Healthy Youth Survey](#).

Goals for this plan

How will we know if this plan is successful? What do we want the audience to do? This is where we describe as specifically as possible what we hope to achieve with the plan.

SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound. For example:

- Reduce underage drinking among 10th grade students in our community.
- Increase by 10 percent the number of parents who talk with their kids about the risks of underage drinking, by June 1, 2016.

Audiences

A list of target audiences goes here. It may be helpful to segment your audiences and messages into primary and secondary audiences to focus your communications even more. For example:

- Parents
 - Primary: Parents of 8th and 10th grade students in local school district
 - Secondary: All parents of teenagers in the county
- Educators
 - Primary: Teachers of 8th and 10th grade student in local school district
 - Secondary: All staff in middle school and high schools in the district

Consider the following questions when thinking about your audiences:

- What do you already know about your audience?
- What do you need to learn about your audience?
- Is there data that can be collected to measure the impact of your work?

Communication assets

A list of the tools/venues you have available (or could have available!) to support your efforts. Think about:

- What are the greatest areas of need?
- Which activities will contribute the most to addressing these needs?

Consider multiple ways you can deliver the message:

- Social media posts
Blogs
- Email distribution
- Donated media: public service announcements, donated advertising space
- Earned media: news media coverage, op-eds in a newspaper, features in a community or organization newsletter
- Paid advertising: billboards, public transit, publications, online, TV, radio

And the resources available to you:

- Staff, associates from other programs, volunteers, committee members, individuals with media experience or connections
- Budget--funds and "in kind" resources such as donated advertising space or graphic design
- Information and data available about the issue, the target audience, community and media structures
- Partner with influencers of your target audience, and organizations that share your goals.
- Also consider potential barriers: required approvals, lack of funds, hard-to-reach audiences. What are the most effective strategies you can plan to address potential barriers?

Key messages

Messages we want to be sure all emails/meetings/news releases/conversations include go here.

- Research existing messages from state or national organizations which are research-based and match your goals, objectives and target audience. Are there toolkits available for you to use?
- If there is a need to adjust a message for your community, follow best practices for effectiveness. System Managers can help provide technical support around messaging.

Risks and mitigation strategies

What could go wrong with the communications? This is where to list any potential risks and suggested strategies to counter them. For example:

- **Risk:** Changing images from a national Center for Disease Control campaign toolkit to use local photos
- **Mitigation:** Show drafts of campaign materials to a System Manager to get feedback on clarity of message.
- **Risk:** News release gets lost in the noise of another major media event.
- **Mitigation:** Look at upcoming events and announcements; schedule news release for a different news cycle.

Tasks

Any action items that need to be taken go here, for example:

Develop prevention tips for parents and share through the school’s website, social media pages, and email distribution lists.

Action	When	Who	Audience	Purpose
Website update	Monday 6/15	Susan	Parents and students at the school	Include tips on school bulletin board to engage parents in student health initiatives.
Facebook post on coalition page	Tuesday 6/16 Thursday 6/18	Jake	Organization supporters and community parents	Remind parents of different ways they can support their kids to make healthy choices in small ways every day.

Timeline

An overview of the time in which this communications plan will be deployed goes here. This can be a written description or a visual. For example:

- This communication plan will be deployed the week of June 7 – 11.
 - The first phase will be completed by noon on June 7.
 - The second will be completed by noon on June 8.
 - The third phase will be completed by 10 a.m. on June 11.
- Susan Jones will coordinate the phases with the responsible communicators.

Evaluation Plan

Document successes and capture valuable lessons learned to guide future efforts.

- Determine what questions will need to be answered, and how this will be done.
- Complete both a process evaluation to monitor progress, and an outcome evaluation to measure strategy effectiveness.